

THE CRITIC.

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"J'entends crier partout, Au meurtre! On m'assassine!
Ou, le feu vient de prendre à la maison voisine!
Tremblant et demi-mort je me lève à ce bruit,
Et souvent sans pourpoint je cours toute la nuit."

Boileau.

WHEN I first undertook to superintend the manners and amusements of the town, and to criticise whatever appeared worthy of comment or reprehension, no common diffidence repressed the attempt. Doubt and distrust, and chilling anticipations, were always present to my view; my acceptability to general readers, who always demand *entertainment* for the passing hour, was, at least, questionable. The modesty, or rather natural indolence of my disposition, often led me to suspect the capacity of a *solitaire* for penning strictures upon follies which he could not witness, or satirizing society which he had long since abandoned. A cold reception or scornful dis-

regard in prospect, was all the encouragement to the prosecution of my arduous labours, and nothing but resolute and persevering determination could have repelled those evil forebodings.

But I was wrong,—I richly deserve a condemnation, almost as great as the Scripture assigns to *doubters*, for disbelieving in the urbanity, and placable temper of my readers. My dictatorship is now generally recognized, and acquiesced in—my admonitions attentively perused—my criticism relished, and my numbers eagerly sought for on their natal day. Whilst magazines and disappointed politicians administer daily soporifics to their dozing readers—**THE CRITIC** has become a welcome and constant visitor at the toilet of the belle—in the study of the scholar, and at the table of the senator. He has made his way already to the capital—been presented at court—exhibited his credentials, and received his *exequatur* from the highest authority in the republic of taste.

In short, I am in the full enjoyment of all the blessings, and not a few of the inconveniences of popular favour. For any irregularity in my own conduct, or suspension of my public communications, attracts the immediate and querulous attention of the town. Ever and anon, during my last week's eclipse, I have overheard the reproachful conjectures of my numerous readers, who have been impatiently watching for my re-appearance, and am com-

elled to believe myself a star of no inferior order, while I attract the attention of thousands to the very shadow wherein I am immersed. The extinction of the work, the absence, sickness, and even death of its invaluable author, have been mournfully assigned as probable causes of his recent invisibility. Some few malicious perusers have, indeed, obscurely hinted, that MR. JUVENAL has exhausted his stores, and fairly *written himself out*; but the indignant rebuke of his innumerable patrons, instantly silenced these snakish whispers, and crushed the reptiles, who forgot that their own safety consisted alone in perfect silence.

I now enjoy the satisfaction of informing those whom I have held in painful suspense, that I and my inestimable coadjutor are in perfect health, and well disposed to continue those efforts which have redounded so much to our own credit, and to the unquestionable benefit of the present and future generations. And to the end, that I may stand excused from any wilful default, and may rescue my unoffending publisher from the minute and incessant enquiries, by which his time is consumed, I shall set forth the various perplexities by which the present disorganized state of the metropolis has operated to my disadvantage, and to the far greater prejudice of my readers.

Numerous, and beyond all price, are the speculations lost to the world, by the existing

disturbances, and the corresponding anomalies of the multiplied police.

At one time the studious musing of two hours, during which, I had fully arranged an elaborate essay, was utterly lost by the sudden and alarming sound of the bell of the state prison;—my ideas, like faithful soldiers, at the beat “*to arms,*” abandoned every calmer pursuit, and rallied for a single patriotic *essay* to preserve the public tranquillity. Seizing my rusty fowling piece, I hurried to the field, and although my advanced age prevented my scaling the battlements, or perching on the adjacent buildings, to pop at the poor “*starlings*” within, my services were equally important, as a confidential sentry, at the weakest gate. In truth, I am perfectly ready to perform the painful duty to the community of checking a new issue of malefactors, but like old Athelstane of Conyngsbury, I somewhat prefer the execution of that office in the “*mélée,*” to the selecting of one individual, on whose unhappy carcase I am to accomplish the sentence entrusted by regular authority, to the High Sheriff of the county. An effort so unusual effectually discomposed my thinking faculties, and it would be far easier to replace the leaves of the forest, scattered by the first November blast, on their parent branches, than to collect and re-organize the scattered fragments of my unfortunate paper. Often on my return from my chocolate to my

lodgings at night, the fairest chain of rich speculation has been irremediably snapped by some disjointed member of a *countersign*, roared in my ears by an errant patrol, who had left his discretion at the supper table, and sallied forth in all the boisterous valour of a full stomach, to protect the repose of his fellow citizens. My sleep has been broken by the eloquence of firemen under my window, who call for the object of their vengeance with the same vehemence, and mostly with the same success, that Glendower called

“Spirits from the vasty deep;”

and my morning cogitations are uniformly banished by circumstantial narratives of the “acts and doings” of the present fashionable society of the *Erostrati*. One awful night, however, transcended all others for impudent and vexatious interruption, and cost the world a highly facetious continuation of my strictures on the Homer of the Backwoods. I had finished my supper, and fallen into a deep reverie, in which, as it appeared afterwards, I joined company with Mr. J. K. Paulding, and Basil, in his “little covered cart,” at the moment when the latter had concluded on his “scarecrow” campaign, as many great captains have decided before him—that when you can chase an enemy to no profit, the best thing that remains, is to run away from him. We had proceeded from the banks of the Hud-

son across part of New York and Pennsylvania, and were ascending a beautiful mountain that formed part of the Alleghanies. I rioted in the rich landscapes around me, and determined to accompany the *soi-disant* poet to the depths of the West, when I was suddenly stunned with a voice bellowing in my ear something which I could not comprehend. Two stout Irishmen had suddenly appeared at my side, with "why the d—l don't ye give "the countersign, we've cracked our pipes "shouting after ye from t'other end of the "square." Finding me stand mute, they proceeded to interrogate me in form—"Where "did ye come from?" From the North River was my answer.—"Not to-night, I am doubt- "ing," said one—"and where the d—l are "you going after such a long journey?" "To "the Backwoods," I replied.—"Why ye're a "queer old dog," cried the zealous sentry, "but ye must come to the Guard House?"— More confused and astonished than before, I exclaimed, in amazement, "the Guard House!" "Aye," retorted my jailor (and this answer completely aroused me from my dream) "we "are the patrol, and you must tell your story "to the Captain, for I can't make head or tail "of you." Finding resistance and persuasion equally unavailing, I accompanied them, in silence, to a small inn, located in an alley, where the Captain, a shoemaker, of the same nation as his scouts, was sitting in judgment.

The room exhibited the graceful confusion of a recent supper-party—conducted as might have been expected, from the guests who not long since occupied the table. As soon as my captors had made their report, and departed to resume their duties, I was summoned, by their courteous Chieftain, who, like Festus of old, trembled (I fear from a very different cause), to render an account of myself: “Let us know “who you are, and what’s yuor business.” “I, “sir, am the Critic.” “Ye’re what, sir?” exclaimed the bothered Captain—“I am the “Critic General.” “By my troth,” roared the Commander, “I never heard of that of-“fice, and ye’ll speak more to the point, before “ye get out of our clutches.”—I then informed him that he had nothing else to expect—that I was returning peaceably to my lodgings, when I was interrupted by his emissaries, who had violated my privileges as a citizen, by an unjustifiable arrest, and that if he detained me there during the night, he must do so at his own peril. “Why ye’re an impu-“dent rogue, and have grown old in the trade, “I’m thinking,” said this second Daniel; “but “I’ll take the risk, and hand you over to the “Mayor in the morning.” Thus was my brief examination closed, and I blessed with the prospect of passing the night in the bar-room of a paltry tavern. But my evils were to terminate in the morning, and no literary man,

or gentleman, would feel reluctant to meet the officer who was then to decide on my case. So that I resigned myself to my fate, and had almost fallen asleep, when a deputy from an adjacent patrol arrived, to communicate with our puissant Captain. This was no other than my estimable bookseller—who immediately greeted me with an inquiry for the cause of my being out so late. When he heard I was a prisoner, he instantly attacked my learned judge:—“Do you know, sir, what you are doing? “This is Mr. Juvenal, the Critic, one of the “most respectable citizens of Philadelphia; “and you will suffer severely if you venture “to detain him another moment.” The Captain became alarmed, begged my pardon for the mistake, and forthwith discharged me. My deliverer accompanied me home, and I soon forgot, in sleep, the ludicrous events of the night. Morning came, but where was Basil? where was Paudling? where was my journey of five hundred miles with them? Precisely where an incomparably fine historical view of the modern drama is—which I had partially completed when the Temple of the Art was itself reduced to ashes.—The melancholy ruin of our Histrionic Hall is not more fully completed than the sad dislocation of these precious productions of my intellect.

I am, therefore, not inexcusable—I hope not unforgiven—for this seeming desertion of the

town, to whom I have become so necessary. I beg, therefore, that my readers will consider the manifold evils under which I have laboured, and content their admiration with as frequent visits from me as the disturbed state of our society at present admits. There may be imprescriptable rights of essay-readers—such as an essay of a certain length—with a motto, at stated intervals—written in a pure and elegant style, like Addison's, or Steele's, or mine, &c. &c. But it must be remembered, there are also other rights of *essay-writers*, equally perfect and sacred—such as exposing general follies or vices, by *apologue* or by application, to a fictitious, nominal character, without having every captious fool to answer, who chooses to fit the cap to his own head—to choose his topics at discretion—to affix what classic patch he pleases to decorate his paper, &c. &c.—Whilst, therefore, I profess my strict regard for these rights of my readers, and promise to observe them religiously, I beg that no occasional departure from unimportant matters of form, on my part, may draw down censure, or induce my fair patrons especially to reproach me, as they did, in the case of my motto-less number.—For although the kind beauties can rarely tell, even with the aid of their *beaux*, whether the classic ornament at the head of my paper, is

"A prologue, or the poesy of a ring,"

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they undertook to charge me with ignorance, or with pilfering from a Dictionary of Quotations, concluding from that inadvertency, that my stock of mottos was exhausted.

With this narrative apology for my absence, and the gratifying intelligence that I shall appear more regularly henceforward, I doubt not, all my readers will rest satisfied.

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